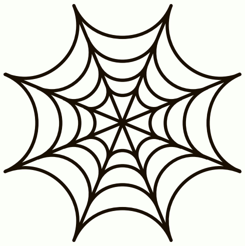
Autumn
2017

Volume 10
Edition 2

Autistics Aloud

In this edition...

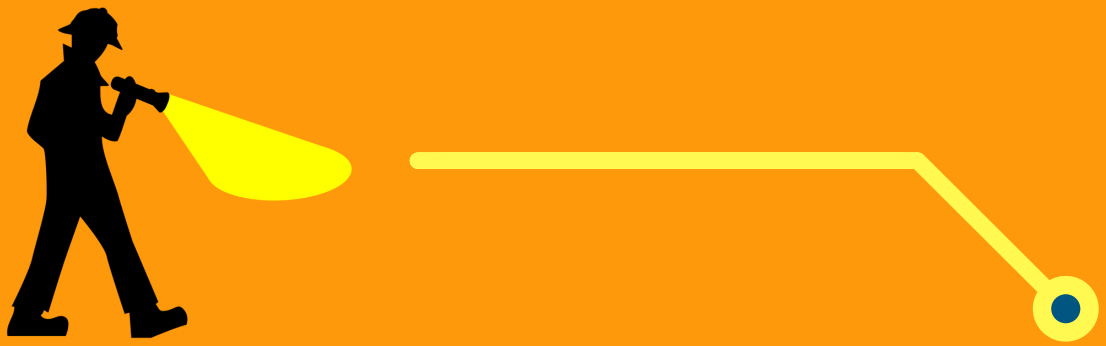


- Poetry
- Autism and addiction
- Word search
- Informal diagnosis (Feature Article!)
- Photography
- Employment/Pop-Up Business
- and so much more!

autism
NOVA SCOTIA

Happy
Halloween

Word Search



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Autistic
Disabled
Dyspraxia
Echolalia
Epilepsy
Meltdown
Scripting
Sensory
Stim

(Not Clickable/Interactive Online)

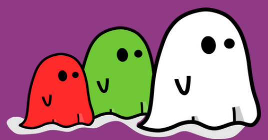
October's Story

A time when the smallest breeze leaves us showered in red,
gold and brown. With each step down a path, the crunch of
leaves underfoot are heard.
Bonfires crackle, smoke billows and smells like marshmallows
and s'mores. Vines tangle around pumpkins growing, bright
orange peeks out in fields of green.
Swirling air starts to chill, sweater weather is here.

Jack O'Lanterns appear, ghoulish smiles and witches crackles
are heard. Halloween is upon us, kids creep around corners
looking for a scare,
"I was a ghost, I think he saw me too!"
I said hi, and he said boo!

When the harvest moon begins to shine full and high,
the witches begin to surface. Be careful who you take a drink from.
Could be witches brew, " poof " you are a black cat.
Goblins run around causing mischief, and mayhem.

Halloween night is here, find your friends and family, Keep them close.
Peek around corners with caution, who knows what kinda fright is
waiting for you tonight.



Erica Mills

I Knew You

I knew you.
I knew who you were and
I knew who you were going to be.
I never cried for what you weren't
Because to me you were perfect.
I saw your joys and understood their pleasure.
I saw your struggles and knew them well,
Because they were my struggles too.
When others saw your oddness,
I saw sameness and it never ceased to make me smile.
Your battles spoke to me clearly
As I battled them too.
Your wonder and confusion
Are places I knew so well.
Together we walk this path,
Interacting with the world differently
But living it the sameness.
I am no longer alone on my journey
And no greater company could I have
Then you.
My sweet boy,
Do not worry
Things will be alright
You will be fine.
I know this for sure.
I know you ...because I know myself.

Rosemarie Carreiro

Autistic Identity

I love being autistic. Before you wonder what I mean, or how I can love something that "creates" so many challenges, I will explain. Yes, you're right that being autistic does mean that I will face challenges that the typical person will probably not experience. However it is, essentially, who I am.

If I was not autistic I would be a different person; a person who did not know the same things I know, think the way I think, or act the way I act.

This person would not even feel the way I feel. Being autistic has shaped my reality since the moment I was created.

While being autistic means that I face challenges that most people don't, I love it. I can't imagine myself without it. I love my autism because, challenges and all, it is who I am.

Kaelynn Bogart, 14

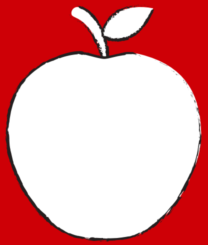
Autumn Child

by Alexandra Forshaw

Around the sun we go; once more we turn,
Unthinking, pages numbered large and small
To mark the passing days. What do we learn
In this obsessive counting? Is this all?
Shall nature be reduced to shuttle flights
That go direct to summer sun's embrace?
In winter, must escape the long cold nights
Constraining warmth to meagre fleeting trace.
Such focus goes unquestioned; normal ways
Astound the eye that sees a simple fact:
Let slip the tightly held beliefs and gaze
On metamorphic transit. Now react:

Unnoticed autumn child, how could we know?
Denying how you differ hurts you so.

EASY APPLESAUCE RECIPE



Fall means apples in Nova Scotia. Growing up in the Annapolis Valley where many apples are produced, it's common to see apples everywhere- in trucks, on roadstands, even on sidewalks being sold at often better prices than at stores. Some apples such as McIntosh and Cortland are available all year round while others such as Gravenstein are available for only a short time.

One way to preserve them is to make applesauce.

Applesauce is relatively easy to make and a simple way to can or freeze apples. Apples vary in sweetness so some applesauce's may require no sugar while others need some. Honey can be substituted for the brown sugar. You can also add other flavourings such as vanilla or orange. Applesauce can be used as a condiment for pork or ham, a simple dessert or a low-fat alternative in baking.

10 apples (McIntosh, Cortland or another soft apple is preferred)
Up to 1/4 cup brown sugar (or honey) (optional)
2 tbsp. Lemon juice
1/2 tsp. Cinnamon (nutmeg or another fragrant spice can be used instead)
1/2 tsp. Vanilla extract (optional)
Orange zest (optional)

Peel, core and dice the apples. Combine the apples with the rest of the ingredients except the sugar in a large saucepan. Cook in low heat, from 10 to 15 minutes till apples are softened. Stir occasionally.
Add sugar and cook for 5 to 10 more minutes or until the sugar is dissolved. For a chunky sauce, use a potato masher. For a smooth sauce, use a food processor or blender. If sauce is too thick, add more water. If too thin, return to heat and simmer, uncovered, till it's thickened.

Recipe based on Sobeys and Kraft Canada

Melinda Cadarette

Chat 'N' Chill

ENACTUS DALHOUSIE & AUTISM NOVA SCOTIA ARE HOSTING A SOCIAL NIGHT FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM TO CHAT AND MEET NEW PEOPLE. ALL ARE WELCOME!

Chat N Chill Runs once a month on Wednesdays from 6:30pm - 8:30pm

TUPPER LINK COMMONS,
SIR CHARLES TUPPER
MEDICAL BLDG,
HALIFAX, NS

enactus Dalhousie University

autism NOVA SCOTIA

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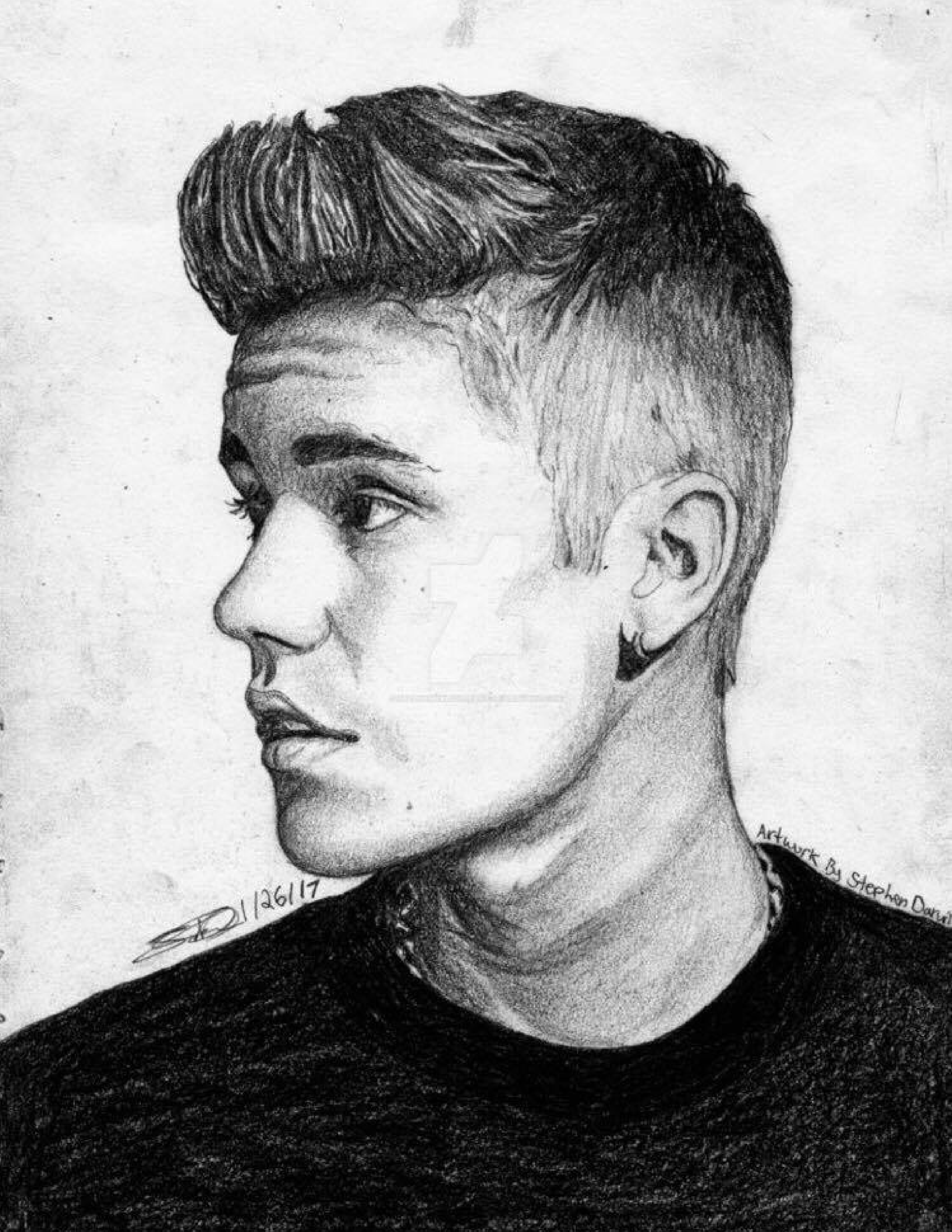
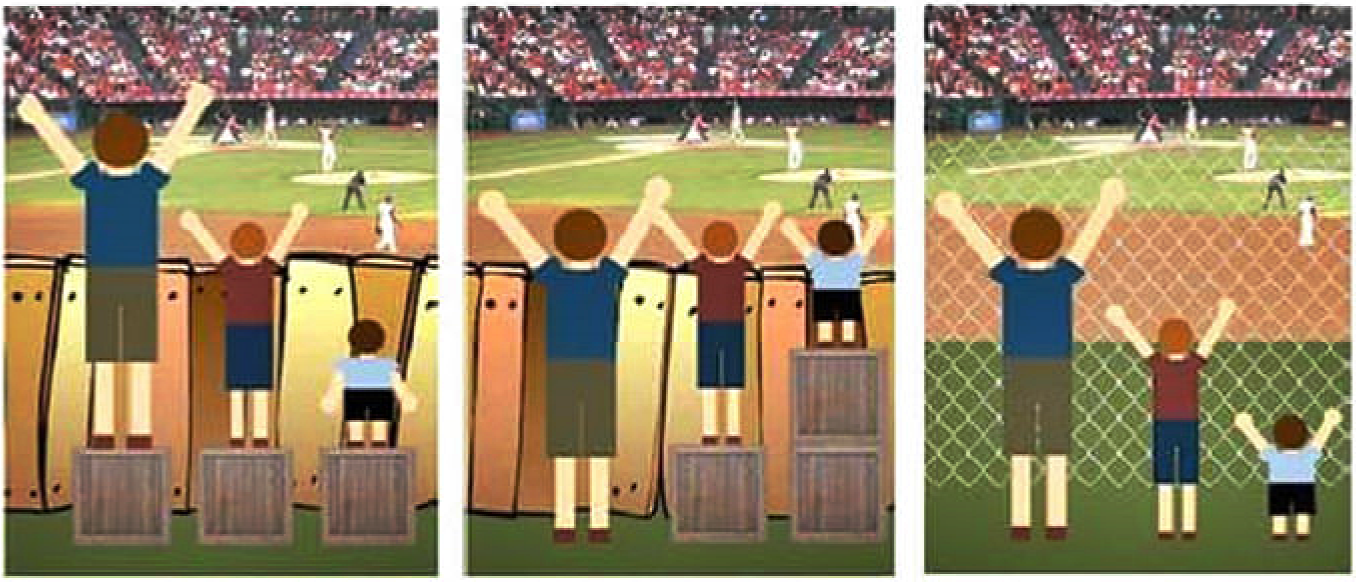
www.Facebook.com/EnactusDalhousie



1/26/17

Artwork By Stephen Darv

EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY



In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated equally.

In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated equitably.

In the third image, all three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

For Emma: Words and Voices

This is in reference to Emma of the blog "Emma's Hope Book". One of the posts she wrote back in 2014 was about the body-mind disconnect that she experiences; her brain knows what she wants to communicate or do, and her mouth (and/or body) will do something completely different.

So.... I was relaxing one day, enjoying the sensation of being alone (save for the cats and dog) in a house for more than a day for the first time in almost a year, when the first verse of the poem this post is about made itself known to me, and insisted on being written. (It kept repeating over and over in my brain until I gave up and wrote it down.) The rest of the poem came very easily.

As the title of this post implies,
the poem is dedicated to Emma of Emma's Hope Book.

This is for two reasons. The first is that she is the primary inspiration for the poem. Her comments about her body-mind disconnect, and her self-advocacy, and her insights into both human nature and the problems facing autistics (and everyone who is different from the "normal run" of humanity) is impressive for being twelve, let alone twelve and presumed incompetent (thanks to misinformation) for most of her life. (I tend to use a paraphrase of her father Richard's words to describe her when I'm telling other people about her story (because it's so inspiring): "She has the soul of an old philosopher.")

So the subject matter was thanks to her, and to Ariane's posting of her words (with her permission, of course). (As well as some other things I've read by non-verbal or partially verbal autistics, like the poetry of Amy Sequenzia, for example. But Emma was the primary inspiration.)

But the poem is also inspired by Emma in another way. I don't usually do "formless" poetry; I have a definite preference for semi-rigid rhyming structure and fairly strict syllabic counts per line. (When I write poetry, which isn't often; I have to be specifically inspired to write a poem, unlike my usual prose writing.) But for this poem... it seems that the way Emma puts words together, and her word choices, inspired my own mind. She has a very poetic way of choosing and using words, and that seems to have ended up inspiring the format of the poem.

(Also, please note: the term "voice" does not have to refer to speech. How many of you had English teachers who asked about "the author's voice"? They weren't expecting you to go find recordings of the author of the story speaking; they were asking about something that could be interpreted from the text. Just a thought to consider as you read.)

So, without further ado, I give you: ❯

For Emma: Words and Voices

Words.
I understand.
Do you?
Caught in my brain
And mouth, like
Fish in a net.
I write, letters
On a page, or
Keyboard, to speak.
Do you listen?
Or do you only
Hear what comes
Through the net?
I have thoughts
On many things:
Life, and people.
Words come hard,
But I try to tell
Them to you.
I know many
Things, of life
And how to live.
Do you listen?
Or do you only
Hear what comes
Through the net?
Words.
I understand
Do you?

Autism and Addiction

Part 1 of 2

I was diagnosed almost a year ago at the age of 46. Like many women in the same situation, when we were growing up, no one recognized the signs of autism in girls, or that it was even possible for verbal girls to be autistic.

Similar to others' experiences, my route to a diagnosis was meandering. I got through school well enough, seemed to interact reasonably well with others (with some forgivable quirks), and while perhaps never fulfilling my full potential, no one, including myself, saw any red flags.

Things started to unravel in university when I started to struggle with mental health – depression, panic attacks (but I didn't recognize them as such), self-harm, suicidal thoughts. I confided in very few people, sought some counselling that helped but I always had the feeling that I hadn't really gotten to the root of my problem, but hey, I wasn't actively wishing to die, so that's good enough, right?

Had a burnout that I didn't recognize as such at 30, I moved to Halifax and basically hid in my parents' house for the better part of 2 years until I managed to find another job and start a potentially fulfilling career.

My drinking had started in university, socially at first, but I remember the day when in a cloud of depression, I had the thought that alcohol could fix this, and the downward spiral began. In my new job as time went on, I had increasing difficulty dealing with job pressures and responsibilities (both real and self-imposed) and I became a full-blown alcoholic. My life was falling apart.

I was fortunate to have a moment of clarity to see where I was headed if I continued on this path, and I sought help from a psychologist, joined a 12 step group, and took a period of sick leave from work.

As part of my recovery process, I was encouraged to review my past - the good, the bad and the ugly, to look at the root causes of my drinking. It was through this process of examining why I behave the way I do that caused me to suspect that I might be autistic. The lightbulb moment was during a team retreat. These have always been difficult for me, I thought it was just because I was extremely introverted, but as I looked more at my behaviour, I recognized what were shutdowns and episodes of sensory overload. On the way back from that trip, I did a bunch of on-line autism quizzes on my phone and discussed this with my psychologist. Then I started to remember the compulsive behaviours of childhood– the hours in the rocking chair or the swing, the various social difficulties, chewing on things, my "fussiness" with food ...etc. Over the years I had learned to suppress my stims. My psychologist had already suspected that I had ADHD, and after hearing my stories over several appointments, she told me I had ADHD and autism, and that I had been drinking to self-medicate.

Autism and Addiction

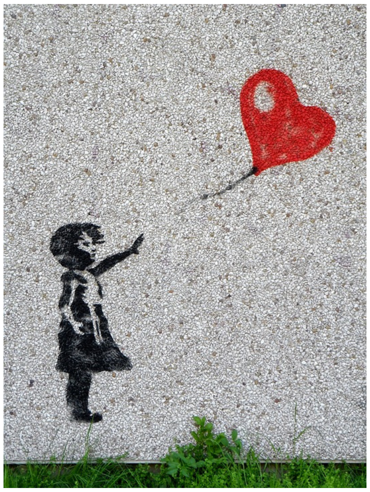
Part 2 of 2

I see now that I drank so much at family gatherings because it the only way I could handle hours of social interaction was to numb myself. It was how I relieved my stress and forgot my feelings of inadequacy, my sense of never quite figuring out how the world worked and how I was supposed to make a success of myself as I thought society expected of me.

It took me over a year and a half of being sober before I could see that my undiagnosed autism and ADHD was a key cause of my addiction. While it’s been difficult coming to terms with the diagnosis, there is a relief that unlike when I sought help in university, I am now getting to the core issues.

In my 12 step groups, I’m now open about my diagnosis, as I’m sure there are others in the same situation even if they’re yet to realize it. One person recently approached me after a meeting wanting to learn more about ADHD. I haven’t yet figured out how to be safely open about my addiction to my neurosiblings, but hopefully this is a start. There doesn’t seem to be a lot of information about autism and addiction, and this needs to change. Given what we know about lack of access to correct diagnoses and the mental health impact as well as the consequences of living with our neurotype in a world that doesn’t often accommodate us, the numbers of addicts are likely alarming. As I write this on World Suicide Prevention Day, let us not forget that addiction kills and autistics do die by suicide at a rate many times higher than the general population. This is a matter of life and death.

It took me over a year and a half of being sober before I could see that my undiagnosed autism and ADHD was a key cause of my addiction. While it’s been difficult coming to terms with the diagnosis, there is a relief that unlike when I sought help in university, I am now getting to the core issues.

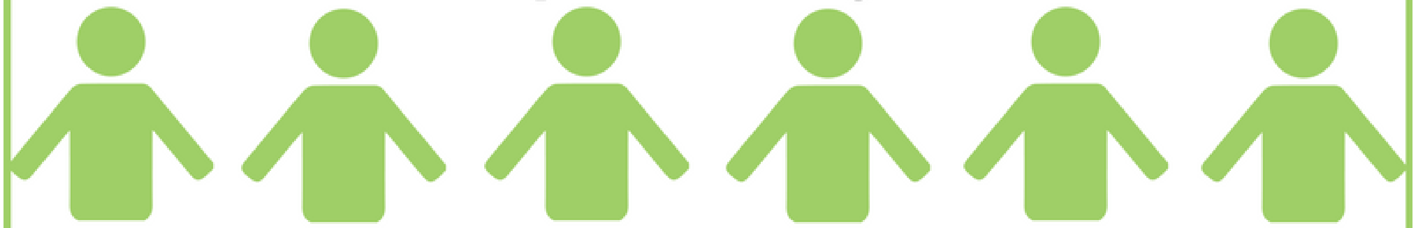


To my neurosiblings who may be struggling with any kind of addiction, even if they may not be directed to us specifically, there are many resources that can assist you on your road to recovery. Don’t give up!

Autism & Sexuality Advisory Groups!

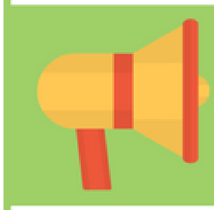
Are you an adult with autism (autistic adult)?

Or a professional in the field of human relationships, sexuality or autism?



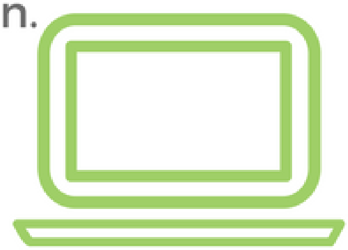
Autism Nova Scotia is developing a Healthy Relationships and Sexuality curriculum for autistic adults, which will launch in late spring 2018.

We are looking to compile two advisory groups who will meet bi-monthly in Halifax to discuss issues relevant to the development of this program.



We want to hear from you!

If you are interested in applying to join the volunteer advisory group, please complete the online application.



Or contact Yevonne for more information
Email: programs@autismns.ca
Phone: (902) 446-4995

autism
NOVA SCOTIA

This project is funded by Department of Community Services.

To clarify, I have got a mild form of Asperger's syndrome as a part of the Autism Spectrum.

With fall just around the corner and no job prospects at hand, my education, skills, and experience is diverse. In the case that I could help potential employers, these employers could find me on Linked in at URL

> https://ca.linkedin.com/in/eric-salem-0b5a0016

I do not just do well in a workplace setting, in that I am talented in various pastimes.

Eric Salem

Catching the Wind

I am flying, somewhere inside me, separate from my physical body and my senses that contact the world. I stim in my mind; marrying my thoughts, creativity and freedom with my self definition. Parts of me glide entwined in an air ballet but other parts wrestle among opposing currents.

I am one who imagines freely and yet seeks simplicity. I am an artist and a minimalist too. I am a feminist and a catholic, a contested combination; but not as contested as being autistic and wanting to be a part of this world that fights against autistic expression.

Bold thoughts weave among my opinions and ideas as I land on the ground as *THIS* individual.

Touching down the world comes to sharp focus. I see my computer and words are falling out of my fingers. My wings fold hidden beneath my clothes.
My mask comes out ready to apply should I need it.

I am not a fighter. I am a kindness seeker, an overly empathetic and compassionate person. And I am seeing a lot of pain in those around me: fellow autistics, typicals, singles, lovers, parents, the martyrs, even the fighters and every individual in the world.

I wonder what is happening. Everywhere I see polygons trying to fit through a single round hole to find the sky. We all know we can’t fit through but instead of advocating to widen the hole to accommodate all shapes, the space is manipulated by one group at a time, only triangles today, squares the next.

For those of us left behind, we are shouting against the wind instead of catching a good current that will carry our cries for help. There are big winds flying far above us. We yell at them;

“Why don’t you see us!”

Shouting doesn’t work. I want to fly next to a big wind and whisper,
“Hello wind. How is your day today? I see you are a passionate wind who admires a fresh breeze. I have a tale that may appeal to you.”

Maybe then the big wind will turn head? Or imagine if all individual breezes united qualities, strengths and nuances into one positive hurricane force. The little hole we are trying to go through would eventually burst open and set us all free.

For now, I watch the shouting and the pain but I want to forget the hole everyone wants to control. I want to think outside the box. Little by little I open a conversation about my experiences, make connections and friendships hoping that sheer kindness will spread like an infection around the globe.

On the outside this multi facetted polygon gets up and sets about the day. The mask is on.

On the inside I give myself an open invitation to be me, an individual who loves and lives and is real.

I am an individual. No one is the same as me.

I share this in common with every human in this world.

We are all individuals. We all want to be respected as such. We are human. We can do great positive things. We can be kind and still get things done. We can, as individuals, unite.

I am setting tentative feet on the world again. I am opening my mouth and whispering to all individuals so you must strain to hear me.

We are all human,” I say, “Surely together we can build the mechanics to fly.”

Will you catch the wind?

Jennifer Lisi

How Autism Has Made Me an Exceptional Childcare Worker

by Frank L. Ludwig

Since I was a teenager, I found that I could relate to children a lot better than to adults. In my career as a childcare worker, I got a lot of enthusiastic feedback from children and parents, and the son of a crèche owner once told me,

"My mum says you're the best we've ever had."

This, I imagine, has a lot to do with my attitude. Most childcare workers have a very condescending attitude towards children, but when I'm in their presence, I don't see myself as the grown-up amongst the little ones but as a peer with responsibilities.

While most people consider autism a disorder, it gives those affected by it a lot of gifts and talents which are rare amongst non-autistic people. When I found myself on the autistic spectrum at the age of 49 and subsequently got diagnosed with Asperger's at the age of 50, I reflected on the role my autism had played in my previous childcare experiences and came to the inescapable conclusion that I owe all my excellency and successes in this area to the condition.

1. Working with Children in General

Respecting Individuality

A lot of childcare workers see their group of children as exactly that – a group. An autistic childcare worker will never think of the group as a unit but as a number of individuals and treat them accordingly.

Autistic childcare workers also tend to deal with children in a respectful rather than condescending manner.

Attention to detail

While many childcare workers aim at running a functioning group, the autistic childcare worker will focus on having happy individuals. Thus if, for example, all children sit at the table and do their paintings, the non-autistic worker will be content while the autistic one will pay attention to each child. This is why I am always the first (if not the only) one who spots when a child gets upset, while many others don't become aware until the child bursts into tears.

Analytical thinking

Autistic people are naturally inquisitive. Not only do I closely observe the children, I also try to figure out what goes through their minds.

Even though I use the term myself, I consider the word play to be condescending because every act of playing is in fact a learning experience, and what appears to others as simple play may be an experiment, the development of abilities or the practice or improvement of skills.

Likewise, in their interactions I'm always interested in the motivations and objectives of each child. This leads to advanced judgments when it comes to deciding whether or not it is necessary to intervene or offer assistance.

Patience

Autistic people know from experience that some milestones may be reached at a later stage, some things may take longer to sink in, some behaviours may be more difficult to adjust, and some situations take more time to get used to; we are also painfully aware of the devastating effect discouragement and resignation of their caregivers have on children. My patience is legendary, and I will never give up on any child.

Explanations and Choices

As autistic people, we detest following instructions without being given a good reason or not being offered choices where applicable. Because of this mindset, we will always explain the reasons behind the orders we give, and we will offer the children choices to pick from whenever possible.

Sense of Justice and Fair Play, Conflict Resolution

Autistic people have a very strong sense of fairness because we are able to see the points of view of every child and suggest solutions that ensure that nobody feels disadvantaged.

We are also famous for our ability to think outside the box. When it comes to solving conflicts, this enables us to come up with often unconventional ideas that take the interests of all involved parties into account.

On the surface some of these strengths, such as the reading of facial impressions, seem to contradict the symptoms of autistic spectrum conditions, but it should be kept in mind that children do not yet try to conceal their emotions and intentions and are therefore easier to understand by those who pay attention.

2. Working with Autistic Children

An autistic childcare worker is to an autistic child like a Cuban teacher to a Cuban child in a Norwegian school. We understand each other in a bewildering environment, more than any non-autistic professional ever could, no matter how qualified they may be.

We understand how their minds work. We can figure out what brings about a certain reaction or behaviour. We are aware of situations that may cause problems for them. We can see when they start feeling uncomfortable.

A lot of our interactions with autistic children are guided by what we consider common sense, but which only appears to make common sense to autistic people.

For example, in a crèche I worked in we had an autistic girl who used to play on her own and was entirely oblivious to the subtle advances from others.

Aware that she wouldn’t approach the other children, I encouraged the other children to approach her, and in no time at all she had lots of friends and was the centre of attention. (I even had to report to the crèche owner because the girl’s therapist wanted to know how she made such enormous progress in just a few days.)

That was in 2007. In 2014, a number of (presumably non-autistic) researchers conducted studies and found out that autistic children are ‘more likely to engage in play when initiated by peers’, something I could have told them a long time ago, based simply on my autistic common sense.

It is not despite my autism but because of my autism that I am such an excellent childcare worker, and the same can be said for many others!

Nocturne 2017

On October 14, the city of Halifax including downtown Dartmouth celebrated the local art scene with an evening full of artistic performances and exhibits. This completely free event showcased a number of places such as galleries and other places dedicated to the arts as well as allowing community groups, individual artists and businesses to show their works.

After seeing a short artistic performance at Studio In Essence (above Pete's), I went down Queen Street and up Doyle Street to visit Zwicker's Art Gallery. They were celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary with a series of artwork depicting Canada. It was not the artwork that gained my attention but their two felines.

One, a large grey cat, promptly decided that I would be better off petting him than seeing more of their artwork. After several minutes, he took off which was my signal to leave. My job here was done.

The Halifax Central Library had a number of events going on, including an audiovisual presentation of the Titanic's tragic voyage as well as some screen art. I decided to save some walking by taking the bus down Barrington Street where I saw the Halifax Circus (at the corner of Barrington and Spring Garden) were doing an outside performance whereas a number of other places such as Argyle Fine Art were showcasing various art projects inside .

After I went off the bus, I walked down to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia on Hollis Street.The gallery had an ongoing art project that people were invited to take part but what gained the most attention seemed to be the Maud Lewis collection. One of Canada's most well-known folk artists, the collection not only includes her artwork but also her actual house that she lived. There's also an exhibition by local editorial cartoonist Bruce MacKinnon featuring all of the prime ministers of Canada. On my way to the ferry I noticed that Nova Scotia Crystal was open with a live demonstration of glass making that can be seen from the outside.

The ferry had karaoke but I easily avoided it by going to the upper deck where I got a magnificent view of the harbour in very mild conditions. Alderney Landing had different activities going on, including crafts for kids and a collection of art run by the Canadian Mental Health Association at the Craig Gallery. On Portland Street there were artistic displays going throughout the street. The main feature for me though was the audiovisual presentation held at the Grace United Church about the Dartmouth experience of the Halifax Explosion. Though I felt it would have been better if it was against a white screen rather than the church wall, it was still an informative if not artistic experience.

Overall, I enjoyed my night out and look forward to next year's events.

Melinda Cadarette

Opa (aka “Old Fart Sir”)

Once there was a gentleman,
We called him "Old Fart Sir."

Although stubborn, he was wise,
Joy and laughter filled his heart

Not only kind and caring.
He was always understanding

When few were found to listen,
His ear was there to hear

Opa never was too busy,
To talk with those in need

Love always was in surplus,
And available for free

Such a special person,
And always in great need

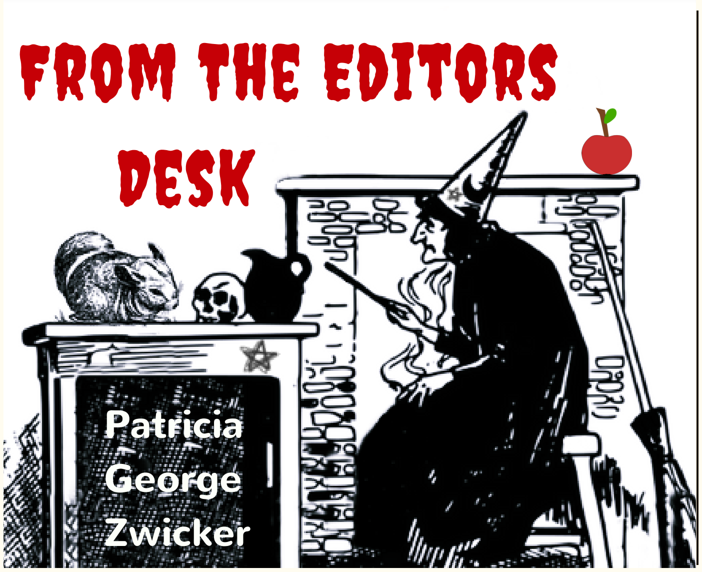
Promoted to glory
At age seventy-three

"Old Fart Sir," you'll be missed,
By family

And especially by me.

Written by Corey SN Walker
Sunday, December 17, 2000, 12:27am

I wrote this poem as my maternal grandfather (Opa) lay dying in the Prince George hospital following a serious stroke. He passed away later that evening.



FROM THE EDITORS DESK

Patricia
George
Zwicker

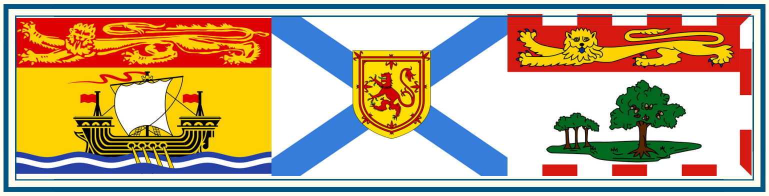
This past March I was part of a panel on Women and Autism at "Exploring the Spectrum Conference" put on by Autism Nova Scotia.

After the panel I was approached by Dr Caroline Jose who is a Research Associate in Moncton, NB. She invited me to a workshop in New Brunswick and called it The CONNECT Project

The CONNECT project (CONTiNuity of care and support for the autism spECTrum disorder) aims to break down barriers and understand the needs and challenges faced by adults living with autism spectrum disorder.

https://goo.gl/WLsynv

The CONNECT Project



After the workshop I was honored to be asked to be Co-Lead of the Project!

Its rare for non-faculty to be Co-Leads but even rarer for them to be Autistic! That's slowly starting to change though.

We put the expertise of a wide range of people together and came up with 3 surveys:

1 for Autistic Adults, 1 for Caregivers, 1 for Professionals. **https://goo.gl/rwAqRJ**

And on November 17 - 18th in Shediac, New Brunswick there will be an Autistic Adults Summit! **https://goo.gl/pyGoyY**

We are still looking for Autistic Artists to showcase their work at the summit!

Telephone: 506-863-2266
Email: CONNECT@mssu.ca

NEW!

Program Committee

If you are a teen or adult with autism (autistic) interested in event planning come join Autism Nova Scotia's volunteer Program Committee!

We are starting a Program Committee to plan activities and events for our recreation and social programs. This includes the Parade of Lights, and our new Drop-In Club starting in January

Contact Elizabeth for more information about the volunteer Program Committee

Email: programcoordinator@autismns.ca
Phone: (902) 446-4995

autism
NOVA SCOTIA

Aaron Bouma

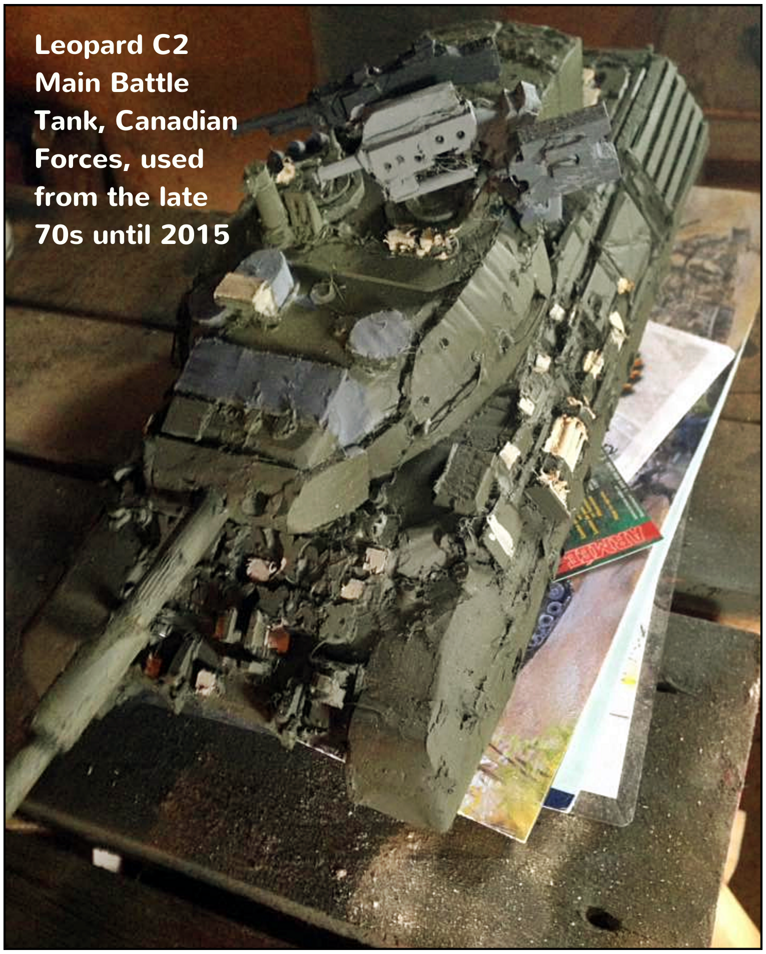
I serve as military specialist for Carleton County and the owner operator of Bouma Woodworks, as well as vice Chair of the Autism Family Friendship Group.

I build military models and furniture from scratch. I build anything from military tank models, rifles, pistols etc

LAV 6.0 Infantry Fighting Vehicle, upgraded and the next step design in the LAV design. Canadian designed like the LAV-III at General Dynamics Land Systems in Ontario. The original LAV designs were from the Swiss Piranha Vehicle

T-LAV Combat Support APC. Upgraded M-113A2. Canadian Forces

I built models from any country in the world, and will soon start to build aircraft and warships as well.



Leopard C2 Main Battle Tank, Canadian Forces, used from the late 70s until 2015

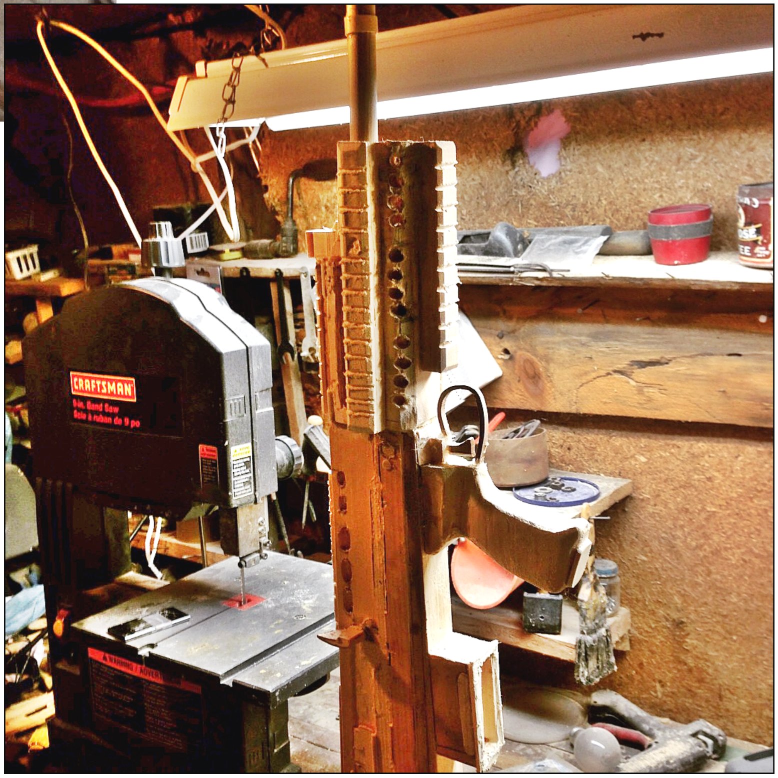
Canadian Forces General Dynamics Land Systems LAV 6.0

Aaron Bouma

LAV-III Group of Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Canadian Forces

These are all built from scratch, my mind works like a 3D printer, just looking at pictures and they are carved out piece by piece and put together

I have high functioning autism, and am a big advocate.
You can check out more on my page @Boumawoodworks on Facebook.



AKMN-47 Soviet Issue Assault Rifle, actual size, (as all my firearm models are), equipped with the 60s 1PN58 Night Vision Scope.

Building Community One Dungeon at a Time

by Jon Hutt, Heroes and Adventurers program founder

Do you like gnomes, unicorns and dragons? If your answer is yes, you just might be a Hero or Adventurer. Welcome — let's play!

Heroes and Adventurers is a free, safe and inclusive recreation program based in Truro. We support over 40 people of all ages and abilities every Tuesday night at the Colchester-East Hants Public Library.

If you have ever wanted to step inside your favourite book or be a character in your favourite movie, this is a program for you.

Heroes and Adventurers uses tabletop role-playing games, such as Dungeons & Dragons, to develop critical life skills, including social skills, moral awareness and critical thinking. Each game night, we learn together as we develop skills and build community—all while having a great time!

Community, honesty and support have been the foundations of this program from day one. I remember on opening night sitting across from just one other player at a rickety little card table at our local game store. We admitted to each another that we used to play Dungeons & Dragons when we were younger but knew nothing about the current edition that we were about to play. That spirit of openness and the willingness to teach and learn from each other continues four years later. We are all learning and willing to share what knowledge we have. We welcome and support anyone who wants to play, no matter how much they know about the game.

Our program has grown so much from that first night with just two players.

We have eleven volunteers running the program, including Game Leaders, Game Coaches, Leadership Coaches and Program Leaders. The Heroes and Adventurers program also receives support from a team of professional consultants who help with our leadership, communication, graphic design and training needs.

Krysti Matheson wearing the snazzy HAA t-shirt that all volunteers receive. She's playing in the new Truro branch of the Colchester-East Hants Public Library.

Building Community One Dungeon at a Time

by Jon Hutt, Heroes and Adventurers program founder

roll call

A NEWSLETTER FOR HEROES AND ADVENTURERS

VOL 1 ISSUE 1

MAY 2017

The game is on: Zach Miller, Carter McNutt, Charles Harris, Jesse Hayward, Jack Harris and Game Leader Jon Hutt engaged in an exciting Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 edition campaign at the beautiful new Colchester–East Hants Public Library in downtown Truro this spring.

Building Skills Through Role-playing Games, One Hero at a Time

HEROES AND ADVENTURERS is a game night in Truro but it's so much more than simply rolling dice and creating characters. We use tabletop role-playing games (RPGs) like Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) to help players further develop critical life skills, including social skills, moral awareness, team-building skills, leadership skills and critical thinking.

The Heroes And Adventurers program is based on well-established elements of human learning. A primary component is the process known as interest-based learning, or play-based learning. This is when players may be unaware they are learning as they are having fun.

Since 2013, we have been getting together every Tuesday night for a session of RPGs. Our group started with a meagre but mighty two people, and has grown to nearly 40 people strong.

In the fall of 2016, we moved to the new Colchester–East Hants Public Library in downtown Truro. The spaces in which we play are bright, accessible and safe.

We are open to all ages and all abilities. Players don't need any experience, equipment or books, and there are no fees. Simply bring your imagination.

Our youngest players (ages 5 to 14) have their own tables, called the Apprentices' Corner.

If you want to learn more about Dungeons & Dragons on your own, the library has a good reference collection of D&D game books.

We are always looking for potential Game Leaders ready to take on the role of Dungeon Master (DM). We'll make sure you have all the support you need to set you and your players up for success.

Are you ready to play? Join a table, roll the dice and enjoy the adventure!

Our community newspaper, the Truro Daily News, has written several articles about our program this year. We're also on social media.

You can follow us on Twitter (@HandATruro)

or on Facebook (Facebook.com/HeroesandAdventurers).

We have our own newsletter, called Roll Call, and have published two issues this year; print copies are available at the library in Truro and electronic copies are on our social media sites.

This summer we held our first tournament and this fall we hosted an open house. As of September 2017, we are also an official society. We are going to use this status to help us fundraise to pay for our operating costs, which include things like volunteer t-shirts, books and game supplies.

We recently developed an in-depth volunteer training module. Our next goal is to share the program with other libraries, community organizations and individuals who want to run their own Heroes and Adventurers program. If you would like to have our program in your community, we can teach you how.

To learn more about the program and how you can start your own adventure, please get in touch.

You can reach me at

hutt.jon@gmail.com

Informal

Feature Article

Jennifer Bogart

I was a little girl who lined up her ponies, sorted her paper doll clothes into careful categories, and organized plastic animals by families and then tried to duck out as soon as the play became social and interactive. I was a little girl who spent hours staring at ceiling fans, wall paper, couch upholstery patterns, carvings in furniture, and the fascinating geometry of old-school linoleum tiles. I was a little girl who rocked and twirled around the living room, lost herself on the swings, and buried herself under layers of heavy feather ticks. I was a little girl who loved words, read adult novels, never studied for spelling tests, and was sent to conferences and individualized tutoring based on writing strengths while being pulled from math classes.

I was a teenager who pattern walked, played with baby toys, dragged her friends to the park to play on the swings, and sang along enthusiastically with all the motions at Sharon, Lois, and Bram. I was a teenager with a vocabulary understood by few, fueled by extensive, obsessive reading of science fiction and fantasy novels. I was a teenager who rode the electronic transit system back and forth back and forth instead of attending classes, repeating the station names along with the recorded, cheerful voice at each stop. I was a teenager who didn't attend class or study much but could pass tests by finding the patterns and answers hidden within the questions themselves. Math however, was another issue, and I failed badly.

I am an adult who tries to balance intense interests with real life responsibilities, who still doesn't hear everything people say to me if I can't see them and who still can't process auditory information well when it comes to details. I am an adult who can't say the socially correct thing, even when I know what it is, because it isn't an entirely truthful statement. I am an adult who still doesn't know how to enter and exit conversations or if it's my turn to talk on the phone. I am an adult who pre-scripts before unfamiliar events and tries to prepare for multiple questions and conversation stream possibilities. I am an adult who loves writing when I have a clear topic and has finally come to terms with basic math but still reverses digits. Let's not even speak of advanced math

No brief snapshot can capture a person's life. I feel like I could go on forever.

The sad thing is that I almost feel as though I should. With an informal diagnosis comes the ongoing felt need to prove oneself, to display the correct autistic credentials.

When my second daughter was going through the assessment process for autism, I finally began to learn what it truly was. A close friend started sending me videos and book recommendations about what autism looks like in females, she'd been suggesting diagnosis for my daughter for awhile. Some of those videos were about life as an autistic woman as she had come to realize that she was an aspie (autistic). When I finally brought myself to reluctantly view those videos I was confused. Wasn't life like this for everyone? Comical videos about life with Aspergers also confused me – what was so funny about this? This was just life.

When I called my friend about it and asked her if this wasn't all just the way life was for everyone, she said apparently it wasn't. She'd had me pegged as soon as she knew about herself. Of course you just can't come out and tell an adult these things, everyone comes to self-knowledge in their own time. I'm forever thankful for her gentle patience with me that helped open my eyes, I can't tell this story without mentioning her.

It was during this long, slow process of research, books, websites, and unveiling that I realized my life was an autistic one. Looking back at it, re-framing it through an autistic lens, it finally made sense. All of it. No longer was it a strange, sub-standard sort of a life, it was completely normal. For an autistic person.

Over a two year period four more of my children were diagnosed with ASD, for a current total of five. Our twins haven't been assessed yet, they are 2.5 as of this writing. I now have some idea of what autism can look like, at least the variants I see in my own family.

The first time I met my children's pediatric psychiatrist he asked me about my own autistic traits. I had no script prepared and stumbled around with an awkward answer. I had honestly thought I was fairly good at passing. I try to follow the rules, I've read the books about body language and communication, "**Lean forward. Make eye contact.**" I think I sometimes seem too intense and stare. He then suggested genetic testing. What a gift. I received the results a few days before my **38**th birthday.

Apparently my brain really is different. I have some genes missing that are important in early neurological development – the **15q11.2 microdeletion** – also known as **Burnside Butler Syndrome**. That explained a lot. When they look for genetic reasons for autism, this syndrome is ranked high for correlation. Approximately **30%** of all carriers having a formal diagnosis. Looking at images of cell stem research when these genes are missing done during early neurological development revealed a telling visual image of why my brain sometimes feels like a confusing maze that takes a great deal of focus and energy to make it behave.

Of the five diagnosed children they've tested for **THIS** deletion, only one has it. My oldest. No wonder she seems so like me. Clearly this isn't the only reason I'm autistic. It also doesn't explain why so many of my children are. As I like to say, "**The Force is strong in this family**."

The geneticist we eventually went to said that in a family with such strong clusters of autism there must be many factors at work, and that even without this microdeletion I would likely still be autistic. I still love knowing about it though.

Informal

Jennifer Bogart

I am an adult who has dealt with anxiety and depression since my teenage years and the one time I was brave enough to ask for help as an adult a possible bipolar diagnosis was mentioned. I couldn't go any further. I wasn't well enough to be that brave. Seeking help for my children has made me brave. I've talked to psychology technicians, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, early intervention workers, psychiatrists, and more. When I was brave enough to seek a formal diagnosis for myself, I was told that no such thing was readily available for adults.

My children's psychiatrist who referred to me in medical paperwork as having, **"mild autistic traits but no full diagnosis"** just through observation without ever taking a history, was too busy to see adults and suggested I contact mental health. We have an odd dance we do where he hints, implies, and infers around my autism but he can't come right out and say it. When I spoke to an intake worker at mental health they told me that they had no processes in place for formally evaluating autistic adults. When I contacted a private practice that diagnosed adults at great cost, they were full. When I contacted the local psychologist she also deferred, saying she didn't assess adults.

For a person who prefers to distill answers into yes/no clarity, the lack of a formal diagnosis was all-consuming for me at times. There were days it was all I could thing about. Weeks when it was an ever present train of thought. Months where I felt confused, upset, and ill at ease. I prefer to close mental tabs whenever I can to preserve brain space, but this, this was a tab that I could not close.

When I applied for membership to Autism Nova Scotia they asked if I was autistic. **Yes or no.** The pain of this question. How could I say yes without a formal, full-out diagnosis. But how could I say no? That wasn't true either. I wrote a somewhat convoluted answer instead in order to present myself and my family accurately. Likewise, when I registered to attend the Exploring the Spectrum conference – I was coming in the hopes of meeting other autistic adult women based on the listing of topics they would cover (**and I did**), there was a discount for formally diagnosed autistics who wished to attend. My oldest daughter received a discount (**I wanted her to meet other autistic women as well**), I paid full price.

At that same conference I met Patricia (editor here) and described my difficulties. She told me that when you know yourself you don't need a neurotypical person to tell you about your own neurology. I have been trying to integrate that understanding into my life. Some days I believe it more than others. (**Editors note:** keep believing!)

Even without a formal diagnosis I have tentatively begun to identify as autistic within my more public spheres. There are questions. I have long, convoluted answers with far more detail in them than anyone wants to hear. Still, I long to just be able to say it with a clear conscience, to have a crisp YES answer, to close that tab. When I advocate for an autistic child I am sometimes not confident enough to say that I myself am autistic, and fall back onto my parent of autistic children credentials instead. They at least are formally diagnosed.

Informal

Jennifer Bogart

While filling out a recent survey for autistic adults **(where it was clearly stated that a formal diagnosis was not needed)**, I came across a new term – informal diagnosis. I had been referencing as self-diagnosed, which I was initially, but an informal diagnosis is when a health care provider has suggested autism as a possibility without a full diagnosis. That would be the case for me after meeting our pediatric psychiatrist. One step closer to formality I suppose, but still a bit grey, charcoal grey perhaps as opposed to pigeon grey, but still not black.

I tell my older children how incredibly glad I am that they have been diagnosed young. That they can know themselves more fully, that they can understand themselves better. I hope that it will save them some of the pain, confusion, and self-loathing that I have experienced in my own life when I did not understand myself. Even with an informal diagnosis, I have never known myself as well as I do now. I have never felt so much that I have a people group that I am actually part of despite my status as an 'informal' member. I am thankful for the knowledge that I do have now and am able to be much gentler with myself. I'm functioning better these days, generally speaking.

Several days ago I received notice that the private practice that diagnoses adults at great cost had made space for me. I could attend an initial intake appointment and see if there was cause for a full autism assessment. I accepted. My greatest fear? That they would say I'm not.

I know myself better now than I ever have and am confident based upon my own findings that I am autistic. But there are doubts, and fears, not about myself but about other people and their perception of me. The common phrase, "**But you don't look autistic,**" and the trepidation that I may hear the more formal version from a professional. From the ones who officially hold the power to bestow the formal letters – ASD.

I try to reason my way through it. I remind myself of Patricia's words. I ask myself if a neurotypical person would even want an autism diagnosis in the first place.

It's still incredibly frightening.

I will be afraid and do it anyway.

I am willing to go through much to move on from being informal.

Postscript: After making an appointment for an initial intake appointment before preceding with an adult ASD assessment, I was forced to cancel it. Our family vehicle failed its safety examination spectacularly and we now need to use those funds to find another vehicle so that we can move our entire family at once. Basic transportation over formal diagnosis, those are the kinds of choices you must make as an adult. For the foreseeable future I will continue to live in the uncomfortable grey zone of an informal diagnosis. I will continue my attempts to make peace with it.

BLAST-OFF SHIRTS

A HANDS ON LEARNING EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE LAUNCHPAD EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM AT AUTISM NOVA SCOTIA

We are a group of autistic individuals who got the idea of selling a product to not just raise awareness of autism, but to also celebrate it.

We started off as the LaunchPad program at Autism NS, coming in thinking that this program would help with our job searching. It was then suggested by one of our members that we make a product to celebrate autism. After much debate, we came up the idea of designing t-shirts; we could customize them as we saw fit, since shirts are a versatile product.

We formed our own company, deciding on roles for each of us within the business, and decided to hold votes in order to make important decisions. With our roles decided, we each performed our respective duties, including finding a suitable printing company, where to sell our product, and how we were going to market our shirts.

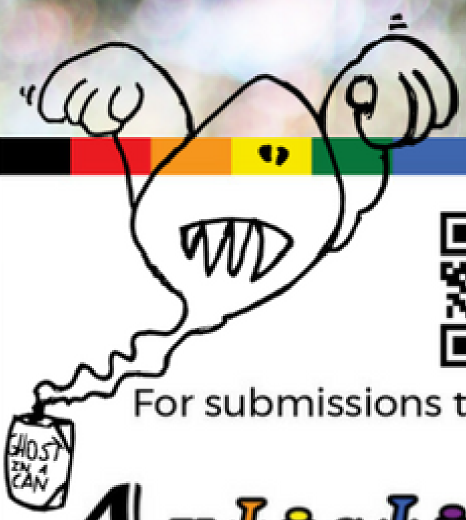
To print our shirts, we went with the local company JYM Line Glassware based in Elmsdale, Nova Scotia. We ended up deciding on a front and back design and choosing four shirts colours to go with. We took preorders and sold each shirt for $20, raising a total of $1,200 during our venture.

LAUNCHPAD MEMBER REFLECTIONS:

Working with the LaunchPad team accompanied much in the way of self discovery. I felt like a real part of the team, having found the piece of the puzzle I represent. I felt as if I had become the second biggest influence within the team of six. I've gained confidence, critical thinking and problem solving skills I had previously lacked. I have new friends, learned how to work within a team dynamic and much more. I would recommend given the opportunity that you go for it and take a dive on the LaunchPad program." - Corey

"I didn't expect the opportunity to get real experience building a business from the bottom up. This whole experience had both times where I had fun and times I felt very frustrated. This lent some realism to this experience; as I'm sure many businesses out there experience these ups and downs on a regular if not daily basis. Overall it was a great experience for me and I'm sure it will be for any other future groups; so long as LaunchPad keeps up the good work." - Craig

"My main goal of the Launchpad was to help me get more experience and insight into what I want to do for my career. I believe that I was able to get the things I was expecting to get and much more. I really liked making my business and being my own boss. I think I may start my own business in the future. Not right now, but sometime in the far off future. But beside those things, I also learned to voice my opinions more, to listen to my teammates, make diplomatic solutions to situations, adapt to situations and I also got to make some new friends. I am glad to be in this program and I will recommend to anyone who is a part of Autism Nova Scotia." - Seumas



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